Bullying and Cyberbullying: What and How?
Cyberbullying means using technology to bully others. Like regular bullying it may involve denigrating insults, harsh judgments, threats, and lies or misrepresentations meant to embarrass another. It can also involve posing as another person and sending negative information, “outing” others by sharing messages that were intended to be private, or “tricking” people to reveal personal information (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008).

Cyberbullying also may be communicated in varying technological modes. Using the Internet one may bully by e-mail, instant messaging, blogs, and social network sites (such as Facebook). One may use cell phones and I-Pads. Most schools have policies prohibiting cell phone use in school. However, students have indicated that, despite school policies, they very frequently send text messages while at school (Kowalski et al., 2008).

Can Schools Get Involved?
Schools can and should have policies regarding Internet use and cell phone use on school grounds. They usually do. However, some people may think that the school should not have any concern about cyberbullying activity that takes place outside of school. However, what happens on the Internet can easily and often does influence the school experience of those who have been targeted online. When there is substantial disruption of the learning environment, school officials do have the right to take action (Willard, 2007).

What Can Schools Do?
Schools have a very important part to play in preventing bullying, and in dealing with both face-to-face and cyberbullying. They should have a multi-faceted, comprehensive anti-bullying policy in place.

1. Develop a whole school anti-bullying policy. This involves planning and communication with staff, parents and students, so that all have information about what constitutes bullying and cyberbullying, have input into policies before initiation, and understand what should be done when they see an instance of bullying (Farrington & Ttofi, 2009).

Communication with the community is particularly important regarding cyberbullying. Students minimize the harm electronic comments can cause, and adults may do the same. Both students and their parents may have a belief in absolute “free speech” and may devalue the seriousness of some cyberbullying behavior.

A school-wide policy will provide overall assessment, and clear procedures for evaluating material directed at students, staff or school. All stakeholders should understand procedures for formal disciplinary action. Not every bullying event may have a school connection or rise to the level of “substantial and material disruption” of the learning environment. However, other action options should be available and clear.

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2. Use the classroom to develop the rules and empathy. Successful programs described in the research literature often had teachers and students develop, at the classroom level, a list of unwanted behaviors that could be classified as bullying or cyberbullying and understood by the children. This procedure enlists the ideas of the students and allows for the explanation of why certain behaviors are wrong.

Particularly for cyberbullying, discussion of the harm bullying can cause is vital. Kowalski and her colleagues suggest we should “use students as experts,” as the sources of the latest sites and technologies (Kowalski et al. 2008). Teenagers may serve as mentors, providing information on Internet safety and cyberbullying to younger students.

3. Clear and comprehensive behavior codes. Cyberbullying events that occur on school property will probably clearly fall under the anti-bullying policy. However cyberbullying often is done away from school to students by students. Some schools have a student-signed behavior code that prohibits cyberbullying behaviors even if they occur outside of the school building.

4. Check for crossover effects. Since electronic bullying is often accompanied by bullying at school, administrators should carefully investigate in-school behaviors that are covered by school policies. If these behaviors correspond to cyberbullying that is taking place outside of school this helps the school to make the argument that the cyberbullying is affecting the learning environment.

5. Effective classroom management and disciplinary methods. Naturally, a well-run classroom provides less opportunity for bullying; there is greater attention to learning tasks and less “open” time. Classroom discipline may play a part in the other direction as well. Overly harsh discipline creates an atmosphere in which “Might equals right.” The assumption is created that one should use status and power to get what one wants and children will imitate these negative models.

If the child feels powerless and disrespected in the learning situation, bullying among students is also more likely to occur. On the other hand, some children will be so used to being dominated by adults they will show helplessness among their peers, and become targets of bullying.

6. Improved supervision. Bullying decreases with more supervision of children on playgrounds, in hallways, cafeterias and other school settings. This intuitive finding should encourage the use of volunteers and other adults in those places where bullying is likely to happen.

What Doesn’t Work:
• Not having any consequences
• Having inappropriate consequences or zero tolerance policies

Students will not inform either parents or school officials if they do not believe that the adults can and will do something. Adults must take action when people are not treated respectfully. Appropriate action in dealing with minor infractions can assist in the development of an atmosphere in which bullying of any type is less likely. Firm discipline is crucial, but sanctions need to be proportional to the offense.

References
